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AUTHOR Blauberqs, Maija S.
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ABSTRACT

Parallels between processes in society and in language are drawn in this analysis of problems invclved in eliminating sexism in language. The paper is organized as follows: varieties of sexism in language are outlined; the linguistic notion of marking is applied to the sexist structures; psychological aspects of such marking are considered; suggestions for change as well as ongoing change in some idiolects are reviewed; and the misunderstandings related to the proposed and ongoing charges and the accompanying ridicule by linguists and others are discussed. Three kinds of sexism in language are described, and the paper foccuses on a type of sexism where the masculine form as the generic occurs. The linguistic notion of marking involves the idea that if one member of a pair is unmarked, that member is then the more natural one and is closer to the ideal or the norm of the unchanged state. The marked member of a pair is seen as the exception and as the more unnatural form. The psychological aspects of continued usage of sexist terms, particularly the presumed markedness of the feminine forms in most contexts, are reviewed. Most of the ongoing changes in idiolects that are related to sexism in language are changes in usage. Many alternative recommendations for structural change have been made, particularly for the pronoun system. Suffixes used to specify the sex of the referent and circumlocutions also have been suggested to circumvent the problem. The analysis includes examples of language usage. (SW)

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Maija S. Blaubergs, Ph.D.
The University of Georgia.

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Misunderstanding the need for eliminating sexism in language

Maija S. Blaubergs

University of Georgia

Sexism, definable as both a belief in the superiority of one sex and the practice of enforcing such a belief, is primarily present societally in the form of male chauvinism, i.e., one could say that the unmarked form of sexism that describes the belief system is male chauvinism, whereas the enforcement of the belief takes place as discrimination against women on the basis of their sex. Sexism is nourished by sex-role stereotyping and by the sex-typing of behaviors and attributes, both of which involve expectations about characteristics and behaviors suitable for members of one sex, but not the other. Sex-based stereotyping forces individuals into one of two categories, ignoring androgynous possibilities. Further, documentation exists (Broverman, Broverman, Clarkson, Rosenkrantz, & Vogel, 1970) that characteristics and behaviors attributed to males are often identical to what is attributed to the human species as a whole. Thus, societally, the prototype for human is male. In addition, the female is seen as the polar opposite of the male, and thus as the other, or the second sex. This description of the sexes may well recall the distinction between unmarked and marked forms in linguistic theory. Parallels will be drawn throughout this paper between processes in society and in language, and indeed, the sexism that exists in language can often be described in terms of markedness.

A traditional controversy exists as to whether language and its usage simply reflects the existing societal system, or if language is itself instrumental in structuring one's perception of the world. Lakoff (1973), for one, contends that sexist usage will not change until society does. I contend that the influence works both ways, i.e., changing one's idiolect may well contribute to a changed perception, while resisting any change may be indicative of one's commitment to the status quo in society and not just in the language. This paper examines both ongoing changes in the sexism in language and aspects of a noticeable backlash against such changes.

The paper is divided into five sections: first, varieties of sexism in language are outlined; second, the linguistic notion of marking is applied to the sexist structures; third, psychological aspects of such marking are considered; fourth, suggestions for change as well as ongoing changes in some idiolects are reviewed; and finally, the misunderstandings related to the proposed and ongoing changes and the accompanying ridicule by linguists and others are discussed.

(1) Sexist Language Structure and Usage

The sexism which exists in language is present both in the structure of language and in its usage. Strainchamps (1971) suggests that the English language is the most sexist of languages and refers to Jespersen's (1923) claim that it is the "most positively and expressly masculine" of all the languages he knew.

It is possible to categorize instances of sexism in language under three main headings: 1) differing connotations for parallel

terms referring to males and females; 2) differing numbers of terms depicting females and males and differing frequencies of usage of these terms; and, 3) differing usage of masculine and feminine terms as generics.

Examples of differing connotations of presumably parallel feminine and masculine forms are listed in Table 1. Other examples and further discussion may be found in many sources including Burr, Dunn & Farquhar (1972), Greer (1971), Hole & Levine (1971), Lakoff (1973), Murray (1973), One (1971), Stanley (1972), Todasco (1973). Suffixes such as -ess and -ette seem to change the meaning of the word as in poetess vs. poet, a much discussed example. Many pairs of words, once equivalent in meaning, have since diverged, e.g., shrewd--shrewish, master--mistress, governor--governess. There has been much discussion of the connotations of supposedly parallel terms such as spinster and bachelor. Words referring to the female sex organs often have more derogatory connotations than words referring to the male sex organs, and, in usage, are often applied to the woman as a whole, while this is much less common in reference to men. Other kinds of negative connotations can be classified as referring to women with words that also refer to animals, food, etc. See Table 2 for specific examples.

Another category of non-parallel forms are those governed by differing selection restrictions: specifically certain modifiers require a female or a male referent, e.g., scatterbrained, shrewish, bitchy, do not collocate with male referents, whereas gallant is not typically used in reference to females. Also the same term applied to females

vs. males holds different connotations, e.g., aggressive, lovely. Most of the terms for having sexual intercourse take only male subjects in many idiolects and carry negative connotations for the female "object", e.g., violate, screw.

Many non-parallel types of constructions also abound in the language. For example, words such as mayoress, millionairess, and ambassadress may refer either to the wife of a man holding a position or to a woman who herself holds the position. This is paralleled in societal practices: organizations exist which include, for example, both women faculty and the wives of men faculty. Other examples of non-parallel expressions are man and wife, and the Mrs. vs. Miss distinction in comparison to the undifferentiated-by-marriage Mr.

The second category of sexism in language is that indicated by quantitative differences in the sex-specific terms existing and the frequency of their usage. As evident in the previous section, huge numbers of derogatory terms referring to women exist, especially terms that define women sexually. However, when occupational terms are considered, the term for the occupation is often used as though it were solely masculine whether or not it is expressly so, e.g., jockette appeared in the New York Times in reference to women who rode horses in races, in lieu of jockey; usage such lady doctor and woman lawyer implies that the occupational term is masculine unless qualified. One interesting aspect of the frequency of usage is pointed out by Graham (1973): of 940 citations of the masculine singular and generic pronoun he in schoolbooks, only in 32 instances

was the referent an unspecified singular subject. That this is a question of usage is supported by the well-documented fact that males are disproportionately represented in books, television, and other media. Incidentally, every single first-born child in Graham's sample of children's literature is a male. This corresponds to Peterson and Peterson's (1973) finding that over 90% of people with a preference for the sex of their first-born or only child desired a male. Of course, the direction of influence is not apparent, presumably because it is circular.

Lexical gaps are perhaps more likely in reference to women-- consider the existence of expressions such as oh boy and oh man but not oh girl or oh woman. Lexical gaps also will be presumed to exist if the generic term itself is viewed as also the masculine. In such cases, the lexical gap for a feminine term is often filled by the addition of a qualifier, e.g., lady author, or by the productive use of a suffix, e.g., authoress. Connors (1971) discusses some of the difficulties in filling such gaps in languages in which suffixes are even more productive than in English.

The third category of sexism in language is the focus of this paper: this is the prevalent choice of the masculine form as the generic in words such as man, mankind, manpower, schoolboy, chairman, and in expressions such as man overboard, to a man, one-man show, two-man tent. The generic term for an occupation is viewed as masculine in most cases. This is easily determined by attempting to add a sex-specifier to the term, e.g., man boss, man lawyer, male priest

all sound much more redundant than woman boss, woman lawyer, female priest. In contrast, those occupations, fewer in number, considered appropriate for women are readily modifiable by a masculine term, e.g., male nurse, male prostitute, male secretary all seem less redundant than female nurse, female prostitute, female secretary.

Similarly, in reference to feminine sex-typed occupations, such as nurse and teacher and child-rearer, she becomes the generic singular pronoun. The term which becomes the generic can be viewed as the unmarked member: What does this mean linguistically and psychologically?

Finally, sexism in usage is encouraged by both the media and lexicographers. For example, Burr et al. (1973) cite textbook definitions such as "monarchy -- a nation ruled by a king;" One (1971) documents insulting comments as well as non-objective definitions on the part of lexicographers. And the media, of course, invents its own derogatory terms, e.g., libbers.

(2) The Feminine as Marked; the Masculine as Generic

The question of generic usage is closely tied in the linguistic notion of marking which I will now relate to sexism in language. The linguistic notion of marking involves the idea that if one member of a pair is unmarked, that member is then the more natural one and is closer to the ideal or the norm of the unchanged state, whereas the marked member of a pair is seen as the exception and as the more unnatural form or the one that requires some addition to differentiate it from the natural state. Brewer and Lichtenstein (1974)

in summarizing the generalizations about marked and unmarked adjective pairs made the following claims: 1) the name of the continuum is derived from the unmarked member, e.g., height comes from high and not from low; 2) the unmarked member is typically more frequently used; 3) the unmarked member is used to refer to the larger or evaluatively positive end of the continuum; 4) if the two forms are distinguished by an overt morphological marker, the form with the affix is the marked form. Others have shown experimentally that the unmarked concept is learned more readily (Klatsky, Clark & Macken, 1973), that comparative sentences with unmarked adjectives are verified faster than sentences with marked adjectives and also that later recall is better for unmarked adjectives (Carpenter, 1974). Since the unmarked term is also the term that typically defines the dimensions as a whole, the masculine form becomes synonymous with the generic. Thus, at best, the usage is ambiguous. The thesis put forth here is that the use of masculine forms in reference to categories that include females is more readily interpretable as referring primarily to the males of the species. When the female is to be focused on, she, the marked member, is the exception. Schneider and Hacker (1973) showed experimentally that the generic use of man in reference to the species is indeed not seen as referring to people of both sexes but rather to males only: their subjects chose significantly more illustrations that depicted only men for chapter headings, such as "Urban Man" and "Social Man," as opposed to "Urban Life" and "Society." Graham (1973) quotes some excellent examples

of how man in reference to the species is not used with a consistent generic sense, e.g., Fromm has written that "man's vital interests are life, food, access to females etc.," and Eisely has written of man that "his back aches, he ruptures easily, his women have difficulties in childbirth." Murray (1973) points out that such subtle shifts from man as generic to man as male often pass unnoticed, at least by the encoder. She quotes a lecturer: "How does Man see himself: As a salesman: a doctor? a dentist? As far as sexuality goes the Kinsey report on the activities of the American male surely affect his self-image in this regard..."

In addition to such usage, which may be the result of the ambiguity of the masculine/generic forms or the egocentrism of the writer or speaker, there are indications that the masculine terms, even when strictly used as generics, suggest the masculine more readily in the interpreter. Further, in many idiolects, particularly those of feminists, the masculine form is perceived increasingly less as generic and more as excluding females. In a letter read on the television program "Sixty Minutes," a viewer questioned why schoolgirls were excluded in a statement made on the previous program to the effect that "every schoolboy dreams of seeing the Great Wall of China". The assertion was also made in the interchange that schoolboy does include schoolgirl. My idiolect does not allow such a generic interpretation, and I suggest that few do. Societally, the changes in the help-wanted ads in newspapers from sex-segregated to general, and the renaming of job titles to avoid the use

of man also indicate that man is not perceived as the generic term for the species. As mentioned earlier, on occasion, the feminine form is the unmarked one, and is then used as the generic. This in itself refutes the contention that the generic usage of masculine terms is not a consequence of the perceived appropriateness of the masculine form for such usage, for it is exactly for those roles that are strongly sex-typed as feminine that the feminine form is used as the generic. In addition to the previously mentioned examples of nurse, prostitute, and secretary, one might add typist, housekeeper, shopper, virgin, teacher and perhaps some others.

Further, Burr et al. (1972) point out that generics such as pioneers are used only if the group includes men, otherwise the form is pioneer women, but no parallel usage of pioneer men exists. Similarly Densmore (1970) has claimed that the gender of a group is determined by the presence of any real or hypothetical males. Certainly, usage changes from the presence of only one male in however large a group of females. For example in Spanish, hermanos, the masculine plural form is used in reference to a group of siblings if only one brother is involved and all the rest are sisters. A related backlash in usage in English is developing that is related to the possible inclusion of males in a group, e.g., the use of he in reference to teachers.

(3) Psychological Aspects of Sexist Linguistic Marking

The psychological aspects of continued usage of sexist terms, particularly the presumed markedness of the feminine forms in most

contexts, i.e., those where the masculine term serves as the generic, will now be briefly reviewed. Firstly, the female is continually presented as "other" in regard to the male and the species. One (1971) suggests further that the presentation of woman as other is reinforced in the language by postulating as feminine anything that is to be mastered by the males: hurricanes, the sea, anything overwhelming in nature.

Secondly, generic usage of many masculine forms reinforces stereotypes of sex-roles. This is unnecessarily limiting and increases the power of the stereotypes that prevail in children's readers, television programs, advertising, etc. Neither do a variety of role models for young girls exist in societal efforts at socialization nor does the present usage of language allow girls to believe that they can become doctors, for example, instead of nurses.

Thirdly, the prevalence of sexism in language is alienating to women whose idiolects are changing. In the process of change in one's idiolect, one may still frequently use some sexist terms herself but be very aware of their usage by others, particularly in written material or where the group addressed is solely or primarily female. The widespread acceptance of Black and expressions such as Black is beautiful no doubt contributed to improved self-concepts for young black people, and moreover, it is a prime example of widespread acceptance of change. Idiolects do change. I suggest that idiolectal change occurs first in the comprehension mode, and only later in production. Certainly, when the variety of possible changes

in sexist usage makes productive change awkward, an awareness of sexist usage is often nevertheless present. Fourthly, unnecessary confusion and ambiguity is caused by attempting to use the masculine forms generically while societal roles are changing and awareness of the exclusion of women in many contexts is growing. Graham (1973) expressed this confusion and ambiguity as follows: "In English, contradictory propositions are true: a woman is a man; and a woman is not a man."

(4) Changing Sexist Language

Most of the ongoing changes in idiolects that are related to sexism in language are changes in usage. Some are attempts at incorporating changes in structure, though such attempts are probably currently still more prevalent in the written language. However, the separation of structure and usage is often arbitrary and a matter of focus.

Many alternative recommendations for structural change have been made, particularly for the pronoun system. Table 3 shows many of these suggestions: their common ground is either that the singular forms not be distinguished according to gender at all (requiring a new form and the dropping of present forms), or that the singular forms include an indeterminate or common gender form (again requiring a new form, but retaining the existing forms). However, one suggestion is both simpler in requiring no new form and in being already in usage to some extent. It is Smith's (1974) suggestion that they be used in the singular as well as in the plural. She

contents, as do many others that English teachers are unsuccessfully striving to eliminate such usage as "When someone arrives, show them right in." Middleton (1974a) points out that there is historical precedent for singular usage of they, e.g., he quotes the Oxford English Dictionary: "often used in reference to a single noun made universal by every, any, no, etc." Miller and Swift (1972) and Chafetz (1974) who argue against the usage of they in the singular agree that it is being used. I would predict more likelihood for idiolectal change in extending they to the singular than in incorporating a set of newly coined pronouns.

Words such as man and its compounds have been successful models of proposed change. Burr et al. (1972) claim that salesman is no longer seen as including saleswoman but that salesperson is now the accepted generic. One could argue that this change has come about due to saleswomen existing in large numbers. The term probably most noticable to academicians is chairman: suggestions for its replacement as a generic have included C.P. or seepee (proposed facetiously by Pei, 1973), chairone (which is used by the National Organization for Women in designations of its officers) chair, and possibly the most commonly used replacement form chairperson. However, a basic misunderstanding has arisen in the usage of the latter. (See Section 5).

Many suggestions have been made regarding how to avoid the sexism inherent in language. For example, one could simply use the plural forms at all times when the referents are indeterminate.

This readily avoids the problem for pronouns. Circumlocutions are also often suggested, e.g., mail carrier to avoid mailman and accompanying absurdities such as female mailman. Reference to both sexes has been suggested as in the cumbersome he or she which becomes quite impossible in a sentence with several pronouns, and, in its sequencing, can still be interpreted as presenting the female as an afterthought. An extreme example, though a common one, of the inclusion of the female only as an afterthought is the practice of including the feminine form in parentheses, i.e., he (or she). Sources of suggested ways of avoiding the sexism in language through changes in usage include American Psychological Association (1973), Burr et al. (1973), MacLeod and Silverman (1973) and Scott, Foresman & Co. (1973). The question may be asked whether avoidance, which can result in awkwardness as one searches for a circumlocution, or the use of new forms which may be temporarily strange sounding, yet quickly available, is the preferable form of change. Many idioms are in flux, trying out many alternatives.

The suggestions for change that concern suffixes used to specify the sex of the referent are of two opposing kinds. Should sex always be specified since the generic term currently is more likely to be interpreted as having male-only referents or should sex be considered irrelevant and neuter terms searched for? The issue of differential connotations is important in making such decisions, as is the need for making female role models available.

(5) Misunderstandings, Sexist Responses and Backlash

I will now turn to the misunderstandings and the backlash and the sexist responses to the proposed changes. The attitude of opponents of change is often one of ridicule rather than any possible valid argument against the changes.

One aspect of the sexist response is the response of the media to the feminist movement in general. Eble (1973), for one, has pointed out how the media attempt to trivialize women's liberation, inventing and using such terms as lady libbers, women's lib, bra-burners.

A backlash is developing that insists that the generic always be masculine, even where the feminine form has traditionally served as the generic or where the usage is absurd, e.g., "The individual's freedom to bear children should not be defined by his education, income, or race." (American Psychological Association, 1973).

Very common and very salient are the overextensions of some quite sensible suggestions for change. Perhaps, this could be taken as indicative of ongoing language change or the learning of new rules, since overextensions are common in first and second language acquisition as new rules are acquired.

Herstory is perhaps one such overextension that was made by the feminists themselves. However, Lakoff (1973) criticizes it too harshly; indeed history was not derived from his story, but historical accounts have largely left out the contributions of women, and her-story usually appears in accounts that attempt to remediate such omission.

However, most of the overextensions have been made with the goal of being able to ridicule the overextensions and thereby discredit the original proposals. A classic overextension that is deliberate and meant to ridicule is woperson, e.g., the title of a limerick printed in the University of Georgia Linguistics Newsletter, aimed at ridiculing change from man to person, was entitled "A Limerick for Woperson's Lib" (Dean, 1973). Brown's article entitled "The English Language versus Woperson's Lib" is replete with other overextensions as well, e.g., depersond (for demand) and personage (for manage).

Snide comments are often included along with the overextensions. For example, Brown (1973) comments that heshe or shehe won't do as pronouns since they sound "too appropriately like tee-hee" and that he always interprets Ms. as manuscript. A letter to the editor was printed in The American Psychologist, in which the suggestion was made that male and female authorship of articles should be identifiable and proposed suffixes, -ma and -fe. The writer's accompanying comment was "But perhaps my male chauvinism is showing, for the female suffix is quite similar to the Yiddish expletive for dirt" (Kay, 1974).

One unfortunate tendency has been to accept the change, e.g., chairperson, but then use it inappropriately. It has often been used only in reference to women as though chairwoman were the problem word. Thus, chairman and chairperson become non-overlapping terms, and the erroneous impression is given that feminists in their desire

to be treated as persons, wish not to be called women. If it remains unclear, chairperson is intended either to replace both chairman and chairwoman in all cases or to be used when the sex of the individual is unknown or considered irrelevant.

Other misunderstandings include half-changes, such as "They were convinced that each man and woman can get along best without anyone to tell him what to do". (quoted in Macleod and Silverman, 1973)

There are absurd cases such as the previously mentioned female mailman and the quite common madam chairman.

There are the arguments that insist on "correctness" of usage and historical precedent.

There are the loud claims that the word man itself is somehow more dignified than, say, person, e.g., Brown writes " 'What a piece of work is a person' doesn't merit an exclamation-point at the end...", and Schneider and Hacker (1973) report publishers' responses such as " 'God and Man' sound greater than 'God and People' ". Some seem to believe that no alternatives could be as good as man, e.g., "'Man' is a short word."

Table 1

17

Differing Connotations of
Feminine and Masculine
Parallel Forms

<u>Once Equivalent Forms:</u>	<u>Feminine</u>	<u>Masculine</u>
	courtesan	courtier
	governess	governor
	mistress	master
	matrimony	patrimony
	matron	patron
	shrewish	shrewd
<u>Feminine as "Marked":</u>	administratrix	administrator
	authoress	author
	aviatrix	aviator
	farmerette	farmer
	Jewess	Jew
	poetess	poet
	sculptress	sculptor
	suffragette	suffragist
	tyranness	tyrant
	villainess	villain
<u>Sexually-Related Terms:</u>	congestion	erection
	frigid	impotent
	spinster	bachelor

Sources: Burr et al. (1972); Hole & Levine (1971), Murray (1973);
One (1971), Strainchamps (1971); Todasco, (1973).

Table 2

Categorizations of Derogatory Terms Referring to Females.

<u>As animal</u>	<u>As food</u>	<u>As child-like or immature</u>	<u>As sexual</u>	<u>As supernatural</u>
bat	cheesecake	babe	cold fish	witch
bird	cupcake	baby	coquette	
bitch	dish	chick	cunt	
bobtail	tart	doll	flirt	
bunny	tomato	girl	nymphet	
chick		kitten	prick-tease	
chicken			prude	
cow			tramp	
dog				
filly				
hen				
kitten				
mouse				
pig				
pigeon				
shrew				
sow				

Sources: Greer (1971); Todasco (1973).

Table 3

Suggested Third Person Singular Pronoun Systems for English

<u>Nominative</u>	hesh	she	s/he	tey	ve	co	they
<u>Possessive</u>	hiser	heris		ter, ters	vis	cos	their, theirs
<u>Objective</u>	himer	herm		tem	ver		them
<u>Reflexive</u>	hermsel		h'self			coself	them- selves
<u>Source:</u>	Archer in Bezis (1974)	Densmore (1970)	MacLeod & Silver- man (1973)	Miller & Swift (1972)	One (1971)	Orovan in Pei (1973)	Smith (1974)
<u>Comments:</u>			for written texts only	distinct gender terms to be retain- ed in ad- dition			same as plural

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